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# **The New Liberal vision of C. F. G. Masterman: religion, politics, and literature in Early-Twentieth Century Britain.\***

Julia Stapleton

This article explores the political thought of C. F. G. Masterman (1873–1927), a leading figure in the movement of New Liberalism in Britain at the beginning of the twentieth-century. The article emphasises the distinctive colour his Christian beliefs and Anglican loyalties lent to his progressive Liberal ideals; this adds a new dimension to the existing historiography of the New Liberalism which, until recently, has neglected the religious influences on its development. The article further underlines Masterman's concern to harness the cause of religious freedom and the disestablishment of the Church of England to social reform; he did so through reviving the older Gladstonian alliance between Liberalism and Nonconformity. It argues that his religiosity – focused on the Church of England – was central to his thought, and was frequently expressed in the language of prophecy he imbibed from Thomas Carlyle and other nineteenth-century seers.

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The New Liberalism of early-twentieth century Britain has featured prominently in historical scholarship during the last four decades. Much of it has centred on Oxford-educated progressives who sought a greater role for the state in creating the framework of a Liberal society than it was accorded in Old, or Classical Liberalism. These include C. P. Scott, J. L. Hammond, L. T. Hobhouse, J. A. Hobson, William Beveridge, and Graham Wallas. All were instrumental in changing the climate of Liberal opinion in favour of the reforms instituted by Herbert Asquith's government after 1908, notably David Lloyd George's Old Age Pensions Act (1908) and National Insurance Act (1911), and Winston

Churchill's Trade Boards Act (1909). Hitherto, most historians have emphasised the rationalist beliefs concerning the progress of society towards greater freedom, social justice, and sense of common purpose that underpinned this political programme, beliefs that leant heavily on "advanced" or "progressive" Liberalism in its engagement with the "new" in modern literary culture.<sup>1</sup> This was salient in Peter Clarke's pioneering study of the success of the Liberal party in gaining seats in North-West England from a Conservative party dominated by Anglicanism at the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>2</sup> Clarke turned next to the intellectual context in which the New Liberalism developed, particularly the increasingly problematic nature of W. E. Gladstone's conception of the indissoluble tie between morality and Christianity to leading Liberal thinkers.<sup>3</sup> Michael Freeden explored the use of biological theory by New Liberals to reconcile science and ethics, building on the work of Herbert Spencer while taking Liberalism in new, collectivist directions.<sup>4</sup> More recently, Gal Gerson has claimed that a defining feature of New Liberalism is its "grounding in secular modernity."<sup>5</sup>

However, these approaches remain incomplete while the Christian as well as the secular influences on the development of New Liberalism are excluded from consideration; also, the firm hold the legacy of Gladstone and his Nonconformist allies retained on the

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<sup>1</sup> Jock MacLeod, *Literature, Journalism and the Vocabularies of Liberalism: Politics and Letters, 1886–1916* (Basingstoke, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> Peter F. Clarke, *Lancashire and the New Liberalism* (Cambridge, 1971).

<sup>3</sup> Peter F. Clarke, *Liberals and Social Democrats* (Cambridge, 1978), 7–8.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Freeden, *The New Liberalism* (Oxford, 1978), 39–40, 256, 89–90.

<sup>5</sup> Gal Gerson, *Margins of Disorder: New Liberalism and the Crisis of European Consciousness* (New York, 2004), 11.

Liberal party. Ian Packer has well pointed out the need for a wider, religious perspective in relation to the Rowntree family, Quakers whose younger members were closely involved in implementing New Liberal agendas.<sup>6</sup> Such a need is equally apparent in the case of the politician and writer Charles Masterman (1873-1927), a prominent Liberal progressive and Anglo-Catholic with roots in Nonconformity. What little historiographical attention he has received has focused mainly on the vicissitudes of his political career, and has underestimated the force of his religion in shaping his thought.<sup>7</sup> A recent study of his role in the journalistic network led by Henry W. Massingham that provided a key channel of progressive Liberalism

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<sup>6</sup> Ian Packer, “Religion and the New Liberalism: The Rowntree Family, Quakerism, and Social Reform,” *Journal of British Studies*, 42/2 (2003), 236–57.

<sup>7</sup> Lucy Masterman’s biography of her husband, *C. F. G. Masterman: A Biography* (London, 1939) underplayed his religion in some of the excerpts she selected from his letters: for example, see notes 20, 32, 127 below. Edward David has illuminated Masterman’s political career further – but again with little reference to his religion: “The New Liberalism of C. F. G. Masterman, 1873–1927,” in K. D. Brown, ed., *Essays in Anti-Labour History: Responses to the Rise of Labour in Britain* (London, 1974), 17–41. The same neglect applies to a recent biography, the wider limitations of which are suggested by the sub-title: Eric Hopkins, *Charles Masterman (1873-1927), Politician and Journalist: The Splendid Failure* (Lewiston, 1999). Freeden has subsumed the spiritual basis of Masterman’s liberalism within the “ethical” in his otherwise perceptive use of Masterman’s conception of the need for a “background to life” discussed on p. ? below: “The Concept of Poverty and Progressive Liberalism” (1994), reprinted in *Liberal Languages: Ideological Imaginations and Twentieth-Century Progressive Thought* (Princeton, 2005), 60–77 at 73–4.

errs in the same way.<sup>8</sup> The shortcoming is also evident in commentary on his social criticism, much of it centred on the work for which he is best known, *The Condition of England* (1909).<sup>9</sup>

The present article seeks to make good this neglect, particularly though not exclusively in relation to his most creative period as a writer, thinker, and politician during the first decade of the twentieth century; this encompassed the years he served as literary editor and leader writer of the largest Liberal daily, the *Daily News*, a stronghold of the Massingham set. The article analyses a wider range of his literary output than has prevailed hitherto, together with relevant aspects of his political activity – party politics and intellectual life being more closely integrated in this period than many others in recent British history. H. C. G. Matthew observed that Masterman’s religious beliefs placed him and his politically astute wife Lucy – née Lyttelton, a great niece of Gladstone – at odds with the “New Liberal era” that opened after 1906.<sup>10</sup> This is most evident in his clear “outsider” status at Massingham’s famous lunches for writers associated with the *Nation*, successor to *The*

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<sup>8</sup> See MacLeod, *Literature, Journalism* for an excellent account of this network; Macleod well recognises the “intensity” of Masterman’s concern with spiritual reform, but without reference to his Anglicanism: 62–3.

<sup>9</sup> For a perceptive account of the book in relation to the wider “Condition of England” literature, particularly the contribution of the rural essayist and novelist Richard Jeffries, see Simon Grimble, *Landscape, Writing and “The Condition of England”, 1878–1917: Ruskin to Modernism* (Lampeter, 2004), 71–5.

<sup>10</sup> H. C. G. Matthew, “Masterman, Charles, Frederick, Gurney, 1873–1927,” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography: From the Earliest Times to 2000* (hereafter *ODNB*), eds. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison, 60 vols. (Oxford, 2004), 37: 251–3, at 252.

*Speaker*, which commenced publication in 1907; at these events, held in the National Liberal Club, Masterman faced what Clarke has termed the “double handicap of his Cambridge and ecclesiastical connections.”<sup>11</sup> It did not help that he made an outward show of his religious views: according to the journalist and parliamentarian T. P. O’Connor, “his watch-chain always carried a little golden cross, and this, with the long, black frockcoat and the expression on his face, gave him something of a clerical air.”<sup>12</sup> Throughout his life he justified social reform with reference to Isaiah 2. Nevertheless, he played a pivotal role in the development of advanced Liberalism and its translation into government policy. Not least, this was through his political journalism for which he enjoyed a formidable reputation: as one sympathetic contemporary wrote at the time of his death, “keenness of insight, rapidity of mind, command of words, combined with the crusader’s élan to produce articles that you simply had to read.”<sup>13</sup>

The rhetorical force behind all his work was a prophetic sense that secularisation was rapidly eroding the values associated with community that he and his fellow progressive Liberals upheld against liberal individualism; also, that the recovery of lost Christian ground was necessary to the success of Liberalism in its advanced form.<sup>14</sup> But a precondition of that

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<sup>11</sup> Clarke, *Liberals and Social Democrats*, 108.

<sup>12</sup> “The Right Hon. Charles F. G. Masterman: A Personal Memoir,” *Daily Telegraph*, 18 November 1927.

<sup>13</sup> A. S. D-J, “A Tribute to ‘Almack,’” *The Guardian: The Church Newspaper*, 25 November 1927, 881.

<sup>14</sup> For a recent challenge to the idea that *perceptions* of religious “decline” within the Church vindicate the “secularisation” thesis about modernity, see David Nash, *Christian Ideals in British Culture: Stories of Belief in the Twentieth Century* (Basingstoke, 2013), 8.

success was the disestablishment of the Church and its de-politicisation in turn, enabling it to focus on the work of re-spiritualising the nation and transforming the conditions under which the mass of the people lived. A fuller appreciation of the distinctiveness of his political and literary voice will bring into sharp relief the tensions in his political persona – as a prophet on the one hand, and a practical reformer rooted in the Christian socialism of the Anglican Church, on the other. Such an appreciation will also enhance understanding of the tangled roots of the New Liberalism and its debt to Christian Socialism;<sup>15</sup> and further, the bridge that Masterman helped to construct between the ecclesiastical and political interests of “Old” Liberalism – duly refashioned – and the New.

The article begins by considering the formative influences on Masterman and his intellectual development as a social reformer in the first decade of the twentieth century. The second section explores his complex relationship to progressive Liberalism that resulted from his Christian beliefs in this period on several fronts. The third section turns to the connections he drew between Liberal politics, democracy, and Church-State relations while establishing his political career. The fourth section considers his role as a minister in Asquith’s administration between 1908 and the outbreak of the First World War, particularly his exasperation with the government in failing to keep to its progressivist agenda, but suppression of his concerns as he moved closer to the centre of political power. The final section assesses Masterman’s place in the New Liberal movement in the light of some of his post-war as well as pre-war work, before his early death in 1927. The article concludes that there was a necessary rather than contingent relationship between his New Liberalism and his Churchmanship, sustained by the wider prophetic strain in his thought.

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<sup>15</sup> As H. S. Jones remarked, this debt has not been fully recognised: *Victorian Political Thought* (Basingstoke, 2000), 92–3.

## Early Life and influences.

Masterman grew up in comfortable if not affluent circumstances in a Conservative household.<sup>16</sup> His father had been a farmer in Sussex before mental illness forced him to stop work; Masterman himself struggled with depression for much of his life.<sup>17</sup> His early years were strongly influenced by the Evangelical faith of his mother, a devout Wesleyan. Nonetheless, his purchase of a second-hand copy of Thomas Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* when he was nine years old initiated a lifelong enthusiasm for Carlyle.<sup>18</sup> This opened his mind to prophecy as a spiritual and political genre.

The precise sequence of events by which he drifted away from the Evangelical influences of his home towards High Anglicanism and political progressivism is unknown. However, some turning-points are clear. At Weymouth College, to which he had won a scholarship on 1888, he was much influenced by *Lux Mundi*, the volume of essays edited by Charles Gore that sought to modernise High Church Anglicanism by a theology centred on the Incarnation and a conception of the importance of social transformation to the Church's mission. But his main interests lay in mathematics and science, both at school and at Cambridge four years later where he read for the Natural Sciences Tripos.<sup>19</sup> As an

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<sup>16</sup> L. Masterman, *C. F. G. Masterman*, 14.

<sup>17</sup> His death certificate gives "neurasthenia" as the cause of death; this is not disclosed in Lucy Masterman's biography, nor is the nature of the nursing home (Bowden, Sussex) in which he died – a private clinic specialising in psychiatric disorders. I am indebted to Mark Curthoys for information concerning the cause of death and Bowden.

<sup>18</sup> L. Masterman, *C. F. G. Masterman*, 11, 19–20, 18.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 18–19.



undergraduate, his religious faith all but collapsed; exposed to a range of new currents – literary, philosophical, artistic – he experienced what he recalled in 1908 to his future wife as the “aridity” of religion:

that was the time when ... we were faced with ultimate challenges of thought without any outlet in service, either for God or man: and in consequence we worried and ruined and tortured ourselves over the bare intellectual affirmations – hardy, dusty defiant pieces of dogmatic assertion, as they seemed to us then: as they seem still to so many now.<sup>20</sup>

At Cambridge, he kept company with G. M. Trevelyan, G. P. Gooch, and Noel Buxton, undergraduates with strong progressivist – and in Trevelyan’s case, anti-clerical – sympathies.<sup>21</sup> He gained a First in the Moral Sciences Tripos in 1896, the year in which he became President of the Union; at this time, and on his return to Cambridge in 1897 after a brief period of school teaching, he was much influenced by Henry Sidgwick and Frederick Myers, both agnostics who took a keen interest in psychical research. However, he was also drawn to Armitage Robinson, Dean of Christ’s College, a leading Anglo-Catholic who had been educated at Cambridge when the legacy of the Christian Socialist F. D. Maurice

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<sup>20</sup> An excerpt from the letter – responding to Lucy Lyttleton’s religious doubt – appears in L. Masterman, *C. F. G. Masterman*, 100. The excerpt excludes the quotations from Carlyle’s letters and from the Psalms with which he sought to shore up her faith. Masterman to Lucy Lyttleton, 18 February 1908, C. F. G. Masterman Papers, Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham (hereafter, CFGM Papers), 1/1/40.

<sup>21</sup> David Cannadine, *G.M. Trevelyan: A Life in History* (London: Harper Collins, 1992), 35–8.

remained apparent.<sup>22</sup> Under Robinson's influence, Masterman underwent a full religious conversion.<sup>23</sup> On leaving Cambridge in 1898, he took up residence in Dean's Yard, Westminster, following Robinson's appointment as Rector of St Margaret's, Westminster, and Canon of Westminster Abbey. There, he was introduced to other prominent Anglo-Catholic figures, including Gore – a strong advocate of disestablishment which was soon to inform Masterman's politics and Churchmanship, too – and Henry Scott Holland (a contributor to *Lux Mundi*). He became part of a wide circle of Anglican social activists centred on the Christian Social Union (CSU) established by Scott Holland in 1888 to spread the gospel of Christian Socialism associated with Maurice and Charles Kingsley. As one contemporary noted, he helped the organisation “to become more of a fighting body than it would otherwise have been.”<sup>24</sup>

At Westminster, Masterman completed his first book, *Tennyson as a Religious Teacher* (1900). This closely argued work credited the poet with recognising spiritual realities, but berated him for propagating a religion based on the denial of God as a “[p]resence with which he could enter into relation, the satisfaction of the yearning and the desire of men.”<sup>25</sup> Like Tennyson, Masterman had serious religious doubts, in his case centring on the doctrine of the Virgin Birth, which drew him away from the clerical career he

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<sup>22</sup> T. F. Taylor, “Robinson, Joseph Armitage (1858–1933),” *ODNB*, 47: 376–8; James Kirby, *Historians and the Church of England: Religion and Historical Scholarship, 1870–1920* (Oxford, 2016), 31–2.

<sup>23</sup> L. Masterman, *C.F.G. Masterman*, 21.

<sup>24</sup> A. S. D-J, “A Tribute to ‘Almack.’”

<sup>25</sup> C. F. G. Masterman (hereafter Masterman), *Tennyson as a Religious Teacher* (London, 1900), 50–1.

contemplated briefly. But while other Liberal collectivists sought a new basis for social and economic relations in the moral strictures of philosophical Idealism, Masterman remained wedded to the Incarnational theology of Gore.<sup>26</sup> This inspired the social work in which he found an alternative vocation at the Cambridge University mission in Camberwell, one of the poorest areas of South London in the autumn of 1900. In *From the Abyss: By One of Them* (1902), he became the mouthpiece of its people. “Always noisy”, he wrote, “we never speak; always resonant with the din of many-voiced existence, we never reach the level of ordered articulate utterance.”<sup>27</sup>

Masterman had also begun writing for Christian Socialist journals such as *The Pilot* and *The Commonwealth*, the monthly organ of the CSU; to these he gave a keen anti-imperialist edge in the context of Boer War jingoism. At the same time, he assembled a book with nine other writers – all from Cambridge – who shared his despair at the widespread enthusiasm for empire in Britain and indifference to conditions at home. *The Heart of Empire* was published later in 1901, with an introductory essay by Masterman. Provocatively entitled “Realities at Home”, the essay attacked Imperialism for reversing the tide of concern

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<sup>26</sup> See his critical reviews of the work of the Idealist philosopher and New Liberal politician R. B. Haldane: “A Statesman’s Philosophy,” *Daily News* (hereafter *DN*), 4 March 1903, 8; and “The Search after God,” *DN*, 15 April 1904, 4. For a trenchant account of the opposition between Gore’s theology and that of Idealism, see James Kirby, “R. H. Tawney and Christian Social Teaching: *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* Reconsidered,” *English Historical Review*, 131/551 (2016), 793-822, at 801.

<sup>27</sup> Masterman, *From the Abyss: Of its Inhabitants by One of Them* (London, 1902), 20.

for the poor that had developed since the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>28</sup> He hoped that the Liberal party could be persuaded to act on the book's recommendations given the strong Liberal connections of several of its contributors. As he wrote in March 1901 to Noel Buxton, a fellow contributor who was also active in the settlement movement, "our opportunity lies in the hopeless disorganisation of the Liberal Party and their *real need* of some social policy."<sup>29</sup>

Clearly, Masterman was a Liberal by circumstance rather than conviction at this stage of his career, probably because of the wider difficulty to which Keith Robbins has pointed of translating "social Christianity" into the "competitive world of party politics."<sup>30</sup> He pinned his early faith in the party on the conversion of its imperialist wing under Lord Rosebery, Asquith, R. B. Haldane, and Edward Grey. They, at least, embraced the need for social reform, if motivated primarily by concerns for national efficiency: Asquith in particular showed little sensitivity to the need for "a background to life", "some spiritual force or ideal elevated over the shabby scene of temporary failure."<sup>31</sup> In a further letter to Buxton in June 1901, Masterman urged his friend to "pray for light to shine on all 'Liberal Imperialists' when they are indecently sham, hypocrites, self-seekers and 'souls' – and think of schemes to draw Christians together in the midst of a Pagan world."<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Masterman *et al.*, *The Heart of the Empire: Discussions of Problems of Modern City Life in England* (1901), ed. Bentley B. Gilbert (Brighton, 1973), 3–4.

<sup>29</sup> L. Masterman, *C. F. G. Masterman*, 41.

<sup>30</sup> Keith Robbins, *England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales: The Christian Church, 1900–2000* (Oxford, 2008), 62.

<sup>31</sup> Masterman, "Realities at Home," in Masterman *et al.*, *The Heart of the Empire*, 30.

<sup>32</sup> Masterman to Buxton, 4 June 1901, CFGM Papers, 2/3/1/8; this and a passage with a strong biblical resonance is omitted from excerpts from the letter in L. Masterman, *C. F. G.*

In attacking imperialism, Masterman invoked the prophets, older and more recent. For example, in 1902, he returned a letter to Buxton from what he termed – tongue firmly in cheek – “a saintly lady” who had criticised the unsettling effects of *The Heart of Empire*. “Her remarks are pertinent,” he wrote,

– but the same could be said against all reformers from the Ebrew [sic] prophets downwards. The blessed Isaiah also could be termed dull to the idle rich – disquieting to the Good – and discontenting to the submerged. So we must e’en [sic] perforce go ahead though the heavens fall.<sup>33</sup>

Among the latter-day reformers on whom he leant were the secular prophets of the Victorian Age. For example, in connection with Liberal imperialist neglect of the “background to life,” he quoted Carlyle’s warning that “the visible becomes the Bestial when it rests not on the invisible.”<sup>34</sup> Carlyle featured alongside John Ruskin, Kingsley, William Morris, Hugues-Félicité Robert de Lamennais, Giuseppe Mazzini, Ferdinand Lassalle, Walt Whitman, and Henry Thoreau in the University of London extension lecture series he

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*Masterman*, 43. The “souls” is a reference to the aristocratic set centred on a number of prominent Unionist politicians; these included Arthur Balfour, Lord Curzon, George Wyndham, and Alfred Lyttelton – Lucy Lyttelton’s uncle.

<sup>33</sup> Masterman to Buxton, 5 March 1902, CFGM Papers, 2/3/1/10.

<sup>34</sup> “Realities at Home,” in Masterman *et al.*, *The Heart of the Empire*, 32, quoting a letter from Carlyle to Ralph Waldo Emerson, May 1835, in response to the enthusiastic reception of *Sartor Resartus* in America.

delivered in 1903 on “Ideals of Life in the Nineteenth Century”.<sup>35</sup> Noticeable for their absence were prominent Liberal thinkers such as J. S. Mill, Alexis de Tocqueville, Herbert Spencer, and T. H. Green. The difference lay in the urgency with which, Jeremiah style, the Victorian sages sought to shatter the complacency of their time, a complacency rooted in a belief in the supremacy of logic, reason, and matter as the key to knowledge and experience.<sup>36</sup> By contrast, for all their keen political engagement, their Liberal contemporaries were concerned primarily to understand modern society from a scientific or philosophical perspective, or a combination of both. The greater attraction of prophecy to Masterman is clear in the full title of his first work of social criticism: *In Peril of Change: Essays Written in a Time of Tranquillity* (1905). Indeed, one perceptive reviewer – an older Liberal politician and writer G. W. E. Russell, whose rare Christian socialism amongst members of the political class cemented his friendship with Masterman – emphasised his dual status as a prophet, both “a foreteller and forth-teller.”<sup>37</sup>

It is true that Masterman moved closer to Liberalism and to the Liberal party around this time. Towards the end of 1903, Herbert Gladstone, the party’s Chief Whip, persuaded him to become the party’s candidate in the Dulwich by-election.<sup>38</sup> He fought a vigorous

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<sup>35</sup> University of London (University Extension Lectures), Syllabus of a Course of Lectures on *Ideals of Life in the Nineteenth Century*, by Charles F. G. Masterman (London, 1903).

CFGM Papers, 66/1/2.

<sup>36</sup> John Holloway, *The Victorian Sage: Studies in Argument* (London, 1953).

<sup>37</sup> See George W. E. Russell, “A Prophet in the Making,” *DN*, 22 May 1905, 4.

<sup>38</sup> L. Masterman, *C. F. G. Masterman*, 51; and Masterman to Herbert Gladstone, Chief Liberal Whip, 6 July 1909, British Library (BL) Add. MSS 46067, fol. 68. He was

campaign, not least on Church issues, as will be seen later in this article. While unsuccessful – he was defeated by Rutherford Harris, architect of the Jameson Raid – he wrote confidently to Gladstone about the party’s prospects of gaining the seat at the general election: despite the “dominating tradition of unbroken Conservative rule. . .we have made Liberalism stand on its feet, in however tottering a fashion.”<sup>39</sup> Yet his identity as a Liberal remained problematic: Russell noted with some alarm his uncritical admiration for certain writers – Carlyle especially – which could cloud his “ethical judgment”. Masterman’s early relationship to Liberalism invites further enquiry.

### **Situating Masterman within early-twentieth century Liberalism**

Masterman shrugged off his defeat at Dulwich to a friend and fellow Liberal activist, Arthur Ponsonby by quoting the medieval mystic St Simeon on his pillar from Tennyson’s poem “St. Simeon Stylites” (1853):

But Thou, O Lord  
‘Aid all this foolish people; let them take  
Example, pattern, Lead them to Thy light.’<sup>40</sup>

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responding to Gladstone’s letter congratulating Masterman on his appointment as Under Secretary of the Home Office: “It was your welcome that finally decided me to come over.”

<sup>39</sup> Masterman to Herbert Gladstone, 20 December 1903, BL. Add. MSS 46061, fol. 87.

<sup>40</sup> Masterman to Arthur Ponsonby, 20 December 1903, quoted in L. Masterman, *C. F. G. Masterman*, 52, but without identifying Tennyson as the source of the quotation.

However, for Masterman, unlike Tennyson, St. Simeon was a figure of admiration rather than scorn; in his book on Tennyson, he had quoted favourably Newman's praise of the ascetic ideal as expressive of religion in its true, "spiritual" sense, using St. Simeon as an example.<sup>41</sup>

In setting himself against Tennyson in this way, the awkwardness of Masterman's relationship to contemporary Liberalism is evident. In his poem, Tennyson typified the movement of "liberal values" that, as W. C. Lubenow has argued, shaped the landscape of intellectual liberalism following the decline of the confessional state from the late 1820s; this was centred on the power of the human imagination to "see things as they are, without exaggeration or passion," in James Fitzjames Stephen's characteristically forceful words.<sup>42</sup> The movement was distinguished primarily by the fluidity of the boundary it erected between faith and scepticism, despite the vicarage origins of many of its leading figures, and also its disdain for democracy.<sup>43</sup> However, along with G. K. Chesterton, the only other member of the Massingham network who moved in CSU circles, Masterman sought to strengthen the tie between Liberalism and Christianity, and with Liberalism's radical tradition at the same time. He much admired Chesterton's early poetry, which depicted human life as an endless adventure, filled with wonder and the sacramental value of everyday existence, and of which democracy was a natural concomitant.<sup>44</sup> Chesterton's poetry and fiction were directed against

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<sup>41</sup> Masterman, *Tennyson as a Religious Teacher*, 167, 170.

<sup>42</sup> William C. Lubenow, *Liberal Intellectuals and Public Culture in Modern Britain, 1815–1914: Making Words Flesh* (Woodbridge, 2010), 26.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 42, 24, 215.

<sup>44</sup> Masterman to Lucy Masterman, (u.d. [November 1907?]), CFGM Papers, 1/1/13; see Mark Knight, "Signs Taken for Wonders: Adverts and Sacraments in Chesterton's London," in



the pessimist writers, artists, and thinkers associated with the *fin de siècle* movement: for example, Schopenhauer, Pater, Wilde, and Swinburne. As an undergraduate, Swinburne's poetry had tested Masterman's faith to the limit.<sup>45</sup>

There were certainly differences between Masterman and Chesterton, not least with respect to Carlyle;<sup>46</sup> but in the early years of their friendship these were minor compared with those between Masterman and another member of the Massingham circle, J. A. Hobson. In reviewing Hobson's *The Social Problem* in 1901, he acknowledged the attempt it represented to establish the "new Liberalism" on firmer ground than it existed at present, "wobbling" uncertainly between the twin poles of Individualism and Collectivism. However, perhaps not surprisingly given his own family history, he condemned Hobson's overriding concern, indeed obsession, with eliminating "waste" from society. This had led Hobson into dark areas of policy such as Eugenics, which for Masterman would arrest rather than enhance "the long development of human progress." Hobson's search for state-centred solutions to social problems also extended to education; he would allow the state to assume control of schools,

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Matthew Beaumont & Matthew Engleby, eds., *G. K. Chesterton, London and Modernity*, (London, 2013), 57–72, at 67–8.

<sup>45</sup> Masterman, "A Look Round," notice of the new collected works of Swinburne published by Chatto and Windus in 1904, *DN*, 14 December 1904, 5. See also his review of the first volume of Swinburne's Collected Poems in 1907: "Time and Mr. Swinburne," review of *The Poems of Algernon Charles Swinburne*, vol. 1, *Poems and Ballads* (London, 1907), *DN*, 14 June 1907, 4.

<sup>46</sup> Masterman, "The Blasphemy of Optimism," *The Speaker*, 26 April 1902, 115–16; Chesterton, *The Defendant* (1901; London, 1902), 8; Chesterton, "Thomas Carlyle," *Twelve Types* (London, 1902), 120–38, at 129–38.

despite his fears for the uniformity and rigidity in educational provision that would result. Most of all, Masterman was indignant at Hobson's dismissal of the Christian churches' potential as agents of reform, particularly as his book originated in lectures to the CSU. Hobson, he claimed, misunderstood the churches' role in society. This was not to pursue material comfort and improvement but to "enkindle discontent: alike in present squalor and future Millennium: perpetually to sting into hunger in every man 'something that was before the elements and owes no homage under the sun.'" Social reform could only ever be a "bye-product" of this end.<sup>47</sup>

Masterman's emphasis on the permanent need for churches, especially the Church of England, to express their dissatisfaction with existing society is revealing. In part, at least, it accounts for his attraction to the Church in the aftermath of F. D. Maurice's influence on the institution. In his book on Maurice published in 1907, he underlined Maurice's concern to bring the "Kingdom of God" closer to the "multitudes", and his conception of the Church this would require. Contrary to present misconceptions, it did not exist to minister to an aristocracy, nor to maintain an ecclesiastical "system," nor to defend the religious beliefs of certain parties within the Church – whether Protestant or Tractarian or Broad Church; it was to strive instead for "national" inclusiveness in accordance with the Church's "distinctively English" Liturgy.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Masterman, "The Social Problem," *The Speaker*, 13 July 1901, 417–18; he quoted Thomas Browne's, *Religio Medici* (1642), at 418.

<sup>48</sup> Masterman, *Frederick Denison Maurice* (London, 1907), 41–2, 27, 37. The book was written for Russell's series, "Leaders of the Church, 1800–1900." For similar invective against the aristocracy for converting through the Church a gospel intended for the poor into "opium for the rich," see his "This Unintelligible World," review of [anon.] *The Old Root*

For Masterman, this mission had acquired renewed urgency. In an essay on “The Religion of the City” in *In Peril of Change*, he reflected at length on the results of two recent religious censuses, one by Charles Booth and the other by *The Daily News*. Both made clear that large sections of the working class – in London especially – had abandoned religion in the daily struggle to meet their material needs, and unlike elsewhere in Europe, they had failed to find a substitute in socialism. In contrast, religion had become a mere “plaything” for the rich, at best an aesthetic experience, especially in the form of “‘Cathedral’ Service.” At the same time, the faith of the churches had “grown cold.”<sup>49</sup> The one ray of hope for Christianity lay with the Anglican clergy who, in the spirit of Maurice, had sought to improve the conditions of the poor while adding spiritual depth to their lives through making accessible the liturgical traditions of the High Church. Masterman particularly praised the work of “slum priests” such as Robert Dolling and Arthur Stanton.<sup>50</sup> He emphasised that Stanton’s concern to raise the class identity of his parishioners cost him promotion within a Church set upon preserving social inequality.<sup>51</sup> As James Bentley has pointed out, the status of such priests as outcasts enhanced their sympathy with the poor. However, politically they tended to identify with the Labour movement rather than with the Liberal party: Liberalism

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*Tree: Letters of Ishbel* (Longmans, 1906) *DN*, 5 December 1906, 4. On Maurice’s ambiguity concerning the relationship of the Church to the wider spiritual society of family and nation, see Jeremy Morris, *F. D. Maurice and the Crisis of Christian Authority* (Oxford, 2006), 78, 116.

<sup>49</sup> Masterman, *In Peril of Change*, 284, 286.

<sup>50</sup> Masterman, *In Peril of Change*, 140; see also 296–7 for other exemplars.

<sup>51</sup> Masterman, “A Priest,” *The Nation*, 21 July 1917, 408–10, at 408.

was associated with disestablishment, which they regarded as too extreme a response to the criminalisation of ritualist practices through the Public Worship Regulation Act (1874).<sup>52</sup>

As we shall see, in the changed circumstances of the early-twentieth century Masterman made the defence of these renegade clergymen part of the cause of advanced Liberalism, alongside disestablishment. Here, it is important to note his use of their radicalism and spiritual energy to challenge what he believed were widespread associations between religion and good works, damaging to both.<sup>53</sup> One such target was the Charity Organisation Society; this was the despair of other advanced Liberals, too, but on political and philosophical, not the religious grounds on which Masterman assailed its chief polemicist – Helen Bosanquet – in 1902. Particularly disconcerting was her failure to understand that the injunction in the Gospel “Seek first the Kingdom of God” required the “creation of a Christian State” that actively pursued social reform, not just the salvation of individual souls.<sup>54</sup>

But it was as much the nation as the state that seized Masterman’s political and religious imagination. On this account, he praised J.R. Green, the clergyman turned historian

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<sup>52</sup> J. Bentley, *Ritualism and Politics in Victorian Britain: The Attempt to Legislate for Belief* (Oxford, 1978), 89-96; see also Nigel Yates, *Anglican Ritualism in Victorian Britain* (Oxford, 1999), 202-12.

<sup>53</sup> Masterman, “The Unemployed,” *The Pilot*, 20 December 1902, 520–2, at 521.

<sup>54</sup> Masterman, ‘The Strength of the People,’ *The Pilot*, 11 October 1902, 379–80, at 380, a review of Helen Bosanquet’s book of that title. For Hobhouse’s secular critique of Bernard Bosanquet, husband of Helen Bosanquet and the Society’s “philosopher in residence”, see Stefan Collini, “Hobhouse, Bosanquet and the State: Philosophical Idealism and Political Argument in England 1880–1914,” *Past and Present*, 72 (1976), 86–111, at 91.

who despaired of improvement having experienced the moral evil that existed in what Masterman termed here and elsewhere the “portent” of London. Reviewing Leslie Stephen’s *Life and Letters of John Richard Green* (1901), he argued that Green’s historical writing had been premised on the same search for “life” that had animated his earlier vocation.<sup>55</sup> Macleod has emphasised that the ideal of “life” assumed “almost totemic significance” in progressive Liberal and other circles in the early-twentieth century, one that was central to the value they placed on the “new”.<sup>56</sup> Masterman portrayed Green as no less alert to the collective dimensions of “life” than the new generation of Liberals in seeking fullness of personality through the social whole. But, he emphasised, as a clergyman and as an historian, Green regarded the English people and the nation they embodied as the main source of “life” in this sense. For Green, he quoted approvingly, the state was “accidental; but a nation is something real, which can neither be made nor destroyed.”<sup>57</sup>

Masterman’s receptiveness to Green in respect of the nation reflected the broad stream of Liberal Anglicanism that flowed from Coleridge and Thomas Arnold into Christian socialism, if entangled with imperialism by the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>58</sup> Nationhood and its religious underpinnings were to shape his practical interests as an MP, as will become clear later in this article. But we should note here that his stance on the nation separated

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<sup>55</sup> Masterman, “Historian and Patriot,” *The Speaker*, 14 December 1901, 308–9, at 308.

<sup>56</sup> Macleod, *Liberalism, Journalism*, 74, 160–1.

<sup>57</sup> Masterman, “Historian and Patriot,” 308.

<sup>58</sup> Jones, *Victorian Political Thought*, 48–9. For an example of the defence of empire in CSU circles, see Henry Scott Holland, “England a Nation,” *Commonwealth*, 10/1(1905), 25–7; review of Lucian Oldershaw, ed., *England: A Nation, Being the Papers of the Patriots’ Club* (London, 1904), to which Masterman and Chesterton contributed.

Masterman from other advanced Liberals. They certainly warmed to the principle of nationality as an expression of the complexity and diversity at work in the evolutionary order of society, particularly in literary culture.<sup>59</sup> Through Hammond, Hobhouse, and Gooch, the movement also sought to sustain the Gladstonian principle of intervention in support of oppressed nationalities, for example in Armenia and Crete;<sup>60</sup> this, they believed, would enhance rather than diminish the cosmopolitan ideals of another earlier Liberal, Richard Cobden, who had resisted foreign intervention in the wake of the Crimean War.<sup>61</sup> However, in a domestic context, they opposed the cultivation of specific loyalties, both national and religious. Against the Fabians, especially, in this respect, Hobhouse and Wallas pressed for a return to the primacy of “reason” associated with the “Old” Liberalism of Bentham and his followers as the only basis of the collectivist state.<sup>62</sup>

By contrast, in *In Peril of Change*, Masterman continued to elevate recent voices in literature and politics for whom the nation represented the highest form of society: for example, Chesterton, Henry Nevinson, Hilaire Belloc, and the poets W. B. Yeats and William Watson. Missing from his account was any representative of the Cobdenite wing of advanced Liberalism, not only Hobhouse, Hobson, and Scott, but Massingham himself. He ridiculed the cosmopolitan ideals of the early Cobdenites thus:

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<sup>59</sup> Macleod, *Liberalism, Journalism*, 105.

<sup>60</sup> Clarke, *Liberals and Social Democrats*, 79.

<sup>61</sup> See Keith Robbins, “Richard Cobden: The International Man,” in Anthony Howe and Simon Morgan, eds., *Rethinking Nineteenth-Century Liberalism: Richard Cobden Bicentenary Essays* (Aldershot, 2006), 177–88, at 186.

<sup>62</sup> Clarke, *Liberals and Social Democrats*, 87, 73.

... all national differences were to smooth themselves out by the advance of knowledge and reasonableness. Common sense, commerce, a universal peace were to create a homogeneous civilisation, secure in comfort and tranquillity and a vague, undogmatic religion.

The Cobdenites had played into the hands of the Imperialist “Reaction” of the 1880s and 90s, coming “perilously near the abnegation of any special national affection, any particular pride in, or devotion to, their land...”<sup>63</sup>

In a stream of essays and reviews over the previous five years, Masterman had developed a wider narrative of the hollowing out of English identity that paralleled, if it was not caused by, the loss of connection to the land and to the Church. He wrote in one review inspired by the results of the 1901 population census that as an urban people the English had become increasingly deracinated,

restless, imperturbable, dissatisfied, knowing little of each other, nothing of the world outside, with Nature abandoned and no Church erected by their own eager labour, and the dead hurried out of sight into some distant graveyard.

He expressed scepticism that this “New England” could “guard the tremendous trust it [had] inherited,” one that had enabled its “Old” counterpart to resist the threat of invasion, for all its immersion in a “life of quietude and simplicity, of poverty and privation, of narrowed outlook and unambitious effort.”<sup>64</sup> He extended this critique to the suburbs: in an enthusiastic review of E. M. Forster’s novel *The Longest Journey* in 1907, he noted how their inhabitants were

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<sup>63</sup> Masterman, *In Peril of Change*, 30.

<sup>64</sup> Masterman, “The Numbering of the People,” *The Commonwealth* 7/4 (1902), 98–101, at 101.

constrained by convention, respectability and organisation, “every chink or crevice closed which might admit fresh air or a vision of the Infinite beyond.”<sup>65</sup>

With its “intimate blend” of religion and patriotism centred on the idea of “home,” Ireland provided the foil to England, the nation it continued to oppress.<sup>66</sup> Elsewhere, he compared Ireland to troubled nations in the Balkans such as Macedonia, which he visited in the autumn of 1907 with Noel Buxton and his brother Charles as members of the Balkan Committee established by W. E. Gladstone.

In both cases a dominant race rules and draws income and leisure from a people whose creed and nationality it profoundly despises. In both cases the effort of a national revival endeavours to make its people stand upright – unafraid.<sup>67</sup>

Masterman looked on enviously, regretting that through commercial and industrial success his own country had lost touch with its national soul, not least through the emptying of the countryside into the towns. One thing he did share with other progressive writers at this time

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<sup>65</sup> “The Soul in Suburbia,” *DN*, 3 May 1907, 4.

<sup>66</sup> Masterman, review of Fr. Sheehan’s novel, *Luke Delmege*, “Books of the Month,” *The Commonwealth* 7/5 (1902), 153–5, at 153. Masterman reviewed numerous books on Ireland, for example, “The Soul of Ireland,” review of Sydney Brooks, *The New Ireland* (Maunsell, 1907), *DN*, 11 July 1907, 4; and “A Plea for Ireland,” review of the Earl of Dunraven, *The Outlook in Ireland* (Dublin, 1907), 22 February 1907, 4.

<sup>67</sup> Masterman, “A Final Word on the Macedonian Tragedy,” *DN*, 29 November 1907, 6. He mentions an editorial he had written on “Disturbed Ireland” for the *Daily News* in a letter to Lucy Lyttelton, 3 September 1907, L. Masterman, *C. F. G. Masterman*, 88.



was a nostalgia for rural England and a strong interest in its revival.<sup>68</sup> The reaction among historians to Martin Wiener's thesis concerning a pervasive anti-industrialism among Britain's intellectual elite has obscured the different expressions of this interest, in deference to the complex political issues raised by the land issue.<sup>69</sup> But Liberal progressivism was not only fuelled by a language of radicalism rich in anti-aristocratic invective but also one of "national community" against the sectional interests promoted by the Liberal party's Unionist foe. As Patricia Lynch as shown, this held the key to the electoral success of the Liberal party in rural constituencies in the first decade of the twentieth century across a wide range of issues.<sup>70</sup> The party's pitch for "national" space enabled Masterman to deepen the ideological field of advanced Liberal politics through articulating a positive ideal of English nationhood and patriotism, and one, moreover, that was linked closely to the vitality of rural life.<sup>71</sup>

As well as the nation, Masterman was removed from the wider current of new Liberalism on issues concerning time and change. Wallas, Hobson and Hobhouse sought a

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<sup>68</sup> Stefan Collini, *Common Writing: Essays on Literary Culture and Public Debate* (Oxford, 2016), 189.

<sup>69</sup> See, for example, Ian Packer in his otherwise excellent study *Lloyd George, Liberalism and the Land: The Land Issue and Party Politics in England, 1906-1914* (Woodbridge, 2001), 3-4, 95.

<sup>70</sup> P. Lynch, *The Liberal Party in Rural England, 1885-1910: Radicalism and Community* (Oxford, 2003), 184.

<sup>71</sup> See, for example, Masterman, "The English City", in Oldershaw, ed., *England: A Nation*, 61-70; see also his critique of the provisions of the Smallholdings and Allotments Bill (1907) in "The Land Bill," *The Nation*, 15 June 1907, 589; see also his *The Condition of England* (1909), (London, 1911), 163-4, and for context, see Packer, 33-48.

basis for a Liberalism that would serve collectivist ideals in the analytical approach of science – particularly theories of evolution. However, Masterman – the only New Liberal to have read natural science at university – was sceptical of the value of science in addressing social and political problems.<sup>72</sup> He was also sceptical of its capacity to provide analogies that would strengthen the progressivist cause, for example, between society and an organism.<sup>73</sup> He was far more receptive to G. M. Trevelyan’s notion of the “poetry of time” than to evolutionary perspectives on nature and society,<sup>74</sup> a notion that was inspired by Carlyle, whose *Sartor Resartus* Trevelyan – like Masterman – had read at an early age.<sup>75</sup> In reviewing Trevelyan’s *Garibaldi’s Defence of the Roman Republic*, Masterman wrote that the work advanced “like a pageant to the sound of music... It is both an example and a

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<sup>72</sup> Masterman, review of Wallas’s *Human Nature in Politics* (1908), in “Can there be a Science of Politics?,” *The Nation*, 12 December 1908, 439–40; Gerson emphasises Masterman’s uniqueness among new Liberals in receiving “a full formal education in the natural sciences”: *Margins of Disorder*, 110.

<sup>73</sup> Masterman, review of J. Ramsay MacDonald, *Socialism and Society* (1905), in “The Newer Ideals,” *DN*, 17 August 1905, 4.

<sup>74</sup> Masterman to Lucy Lyttelton, 1 August 1907, cited in L. Masterman, *C. F. G. Masterman*, 86.

<sup>75</sup> Cannadine, *G. M. Trevelyan*, 29–31. Trevelyan used the notion in his critique of J.B. Bury’s inaugural lecture, “The Latest View of History,” *Independent Review*, I (1903), 395–414, at 412.

vindication of that principle which this writer has so ably defended, that ‘history is something far more wonderful than a process of evolution which science can estimate or predict.’”<sup>76</sup>

For Masterman, Trevelyan’s approach to history was reinforced by Henri Bergson’s theory of creative evolution, whose book of that title in its fourth edition he reviewed enthusiastically in 1909. Disregarding Bergson’s challenge to religious belief, he used his work to emphasise the present as the “moving, flowing time” that constitutes reality.<sup>77</sup> This was important in countering cynicism about the present, not least as the *fin de siècle* movement played out in contemporary drama. For example, in 1907 Masterman lamented the clever and witty but ultimately destructive exchanges in the plays of John Oliver Hobbes, pseudonym of Mrs Craigie; the characters in her plays and novels appeared as “phantoms” acting a “dance Macabre” in a universe indifferent to their fate.<sup>78</sup> This was echoed in the plays of Arthur Pinero, a dramatist who pushed hard at the boundaries of social convention. He attended a performance of Pinero’s latest play – *Preserving Mr. Panmure* – with Massingham in January 1911.<sup>79</sup> He reported to his wife that the play was “rather funny but acrid and cynical, with all [Pinero’s] later contempt for ‘this breed of maggots’ which makes

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<sup>76</sup> Masterman, “The Garibaldian Epic,” *DN*, 9 April 1907, 4, paraphrasing Trevelyan, “The Latest View of History”.

<sup>77</sup> Masterman, “The Philosophy of Vitalism,” *The Nation*, 13 March 1909, 902–3, at 902.

<sup>78</sup> Masterman, “John Oliver Hobbes,” *DN*, 15 August 1906, 6; see also his review of her last, posthumously published novel *The Dream and the Business* (1906), *DN*, 27 August 1906, 4.

<sup>79</sup> Masterman to Lucy Masterman, 20 January 1911, CFGM Papers, 1/1/121.

up the society he deprecates.” He fell to wondering “if that is how future historians will really judge this generation.”<sup>80</sup>

### **Liberal politics, democracy, and Church-State relations.**

In emphasising the urgent need for reform in the present, spearheaded by the Liberal party and the Church in tandem, Masterman was acutely aware of the obstacles to the formation of such an alliance. Not least, the party had become heavily dependent on Nonconformist votes since the passage of Arthur Balfour’s Education Act of 1902; in Stephen Koss’s words, the relationship between Liberalism and Nonconformity had suddenly become more than a “vague sentiment”.<sup>81</sup> In the months preceding the 1906 General Election, this led Percy Dearmer, a prominent Anglo-Catholic priest, liturgist and Christian socialist, to question Chesterton and Masterman’s support for a party that seemed to have abandoned the association between Liberalism and religious toleration in Gladstone’s youth.<sup>82</sup>

In response, Masterman – who, as we shall see, was once again a Liberal candidate – denied any suggestion that closer ties between the Liberal party and Nonconformity recently could be attributed to the “pushfulness” of dissent; this was notwithstanding the bitter complaint of his agent that Nonconformity seemed to be calling the party tune, especially in

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<sup>80</sup> Masterman to Lucy Masterman, “Saturday Evening [21 January 1911],” CFGM Papers, 1/1/122.

<sup>81</sup> Stephen Koss, *Nonconformity in Modern British Politics* (London, 1975), 38.

<sup>82</sup> Percy Dearmer, “The Cry of the Voter,” *The Commonwealth* 10/9 (1905), 263–4.

relation to religious education.<sup>83</sup> He pointed instead to the inward distractions of the Church – the seemingly interminable controversies concerning marriage to a deceased wife’s sister, Church discipline, the Athanasian Creed, resistance to disestablishment, and its unyielding defence of Church schools – leaving the field of Liberal politics clear for its rivals.<sup>84</sup> The Education Act of 1902 – which granted a public subsidy to Church schools – dominated political debate in the years before and immediately after the Liberal party’s return to office in 1906. Nonconformists put pressure on the party to enforce “non-denominational” bible-teaching in all schools receiving the local rate – not just in Board Schools in accordance with the Cowper–Temple clause of the 1870 Act. In response, Masterman was prepared to endorse the “secular solution”: the removal of religion from state-supported education. This was in accordance with the antipathy towards denominational religion as a “Liberal tyranny” propagated by the Broad Church party he would have inherited from Maurice.<sup>85</sup>

Masterman’s advocacy of the secular solution in the context of the education controversy is clear in a letter to his friend Arthur Ponsonby, who had recently been selected as Liberal candidate in Taunton immediately after his own defeat in Dulwich.<sup>86</sup> He cautioned Ponsonby against declaring himself immediately for the abolition of Cowper-Temple, but to

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<sup>83</sup> Cecil H. B. Ince to Masterman, 12 October 1905, CFGM Papers, 3/2/2.

<sup>84</sup> Masterman, “The Reply of a Candidate,” *The Commonwealth* 10/10 (1905), 296–99, at 298, 299; see also “Mr. Chesterton’s Reply to Mr. Dearmer,” *The Commonwealth* 10/10 (October 1905), 306–7.

<sup>85</sup> Masterman, *Frederick Denison Maurice*, 27, 37.

<sup>86</sup> For the origins of their friendship, their shared interest in social reform, and details of Ponsonby’s narrow defeat at Taunton in 1906, see Raymond A. Jones, *Arthur Ponsonby: The Politics of Life* (London, 1989), 31–2, 34–5, 38.

emphasise instead that, if no agreement could be reached among the different denominations, then “secular teaching is the only possibility.”<sup>87</sup>

As this conciliatory tone suggests, Masterman was anxious to secure Nonconformist support for the wider Liberal cause of democracy and reform, not just for religious freedom. This was especially necessary against Protestant diehards within the Church of England; led by Conservatives in Liverpool, a stronghold of the National Protestant League, they had campaigned vigorously to suppress Ritualism in the Church of England through a series of Church discipline bills from 1899 to 1911.<sup>88</sup> He advised Ponsonby to make known his opposition to the most recent bill when responding to a letter from a local Nonconformist seeking clarification of his position on Church issues. In Dulwich, he continued, triumphantly, “I did – defying the narrow Protestants who in consequence placarded the constituency with appeals to the good Protestants not to vote at all – result, the heaviest [Liberal] poll on record.” His opposition to the bill was grounded in a concern to “weaken” the bonds between Church and State, in contrast to the Protestant Erastians who sought to strengthen them. Seizing on Nonconformist resistance to Erastianism, he assured Ponsonby that he would not lose the Nonconformist vote and may also “scoop all the Ritualist votes by opposing [the bill].”

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<sup>87</sup> Masterman to Ponsonby, 28 December 1903, CFGM Papers, 2/3/2/3. This was also Chesterton’s position: “The Secular Solution,” Letter to the Editor, *DN*, 12 May 1905, in J. Stapleton, ed., *G.K. Chesterton at the Daily News: Literature, Liberalism and Revolution, 1901–1913*, 8 vols. (London, 1913), 3: 98–101.

<sup>88</sup> Clarke, *Lancashire and the New Liberalism*, 263–4; G. I. T. Machin, *Politics and the Churches in Great Britain, 1869–1921* (Oxford, 1987), 246.

Election tactics aside, support for the bill would be a blow to the progressivist agenda. Masterman cited the reason that Ramsay MacDonald had given him for rejecting the bill: “I won’t vote for putting every High Church clergyman who does his duty denouncing vice at the mercy of every house sweater or brothel keeper who chooses to pose as an ‘aggrieved parishioner.’” He urged Ponsonby to end his letter by appealing to his correspondent “and his gang” for support, “in the name [? word illegible] of the slum dwellers and the larger moral causes.” The clear message here was that Liberalism should not be defined by narrow religious interests; as he concluded, “To unite the CSU and the Nonconformists is our game.”<sup>89</sup>

Masterman’s letter to Ponsonby well captures the close connections he sought to forge between religious freedom, disestablishment, and opposition to materialism at the turn of the century. The combination of these concerns reflected the influence of another friend, the Anglican priest and historian John Neville Figgis, more than that of Gore and perhaps Chesterton, too.<sup>90</sup> For Figgis, the modern, Leviathan state ever threatened the autonomy of smaller associations, including the Church, and in the context of an increasingly secular culture of thought and belief that portended a crisis of civilisation of apocalyptic proportions. At stake was the independence of the individual within a multi-layered corporate life that harked back to the medieval synthesis, and a Church that flourished only when at war with social injustice. Figgis, like Masterman, had fought bitterly against Nonconformist demands for the teaching of undenominational religion in state schools; this could only mean the denial

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<sup>89</sup> Masterman to Ponsonby, 28 December 1903, CFGM Papers, 2/3/2/3.

<sup>90</sup> David Newsome linked all three thinkers, and Masterman, too, in “The Assault on Mammon: Charles Gore and John Neville Figgis,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 17/2 (1966), 227–41.

of the rights of the Church by an omnipotent state.<sup>91</sup> He, too, praised the slum priests for making Christian (Anglican) worship accessible to the poor, devoid of its fashionable and respectable trappings.<sup>92</sup>

Steeled by the ecclesiastical and prophetic outlook he shared with Figgis, but with less distrust of the modern state as an agent of change, Masterman resolved to enter Parliament. With Gladstone's assistance, he was adopted as the Liberal candidate in (North) West Ham in 1904, a constituency torn by strife between rival progressivist parties.<sup>93</sup> On the eve of the vote, he found time to review a new biography of Walt Whitman, rejoicing in the poet's "worship of life", his clear distinction between "being" and "not being" that provided the moving force behind the chants of the New Democracy in *Leaves of Grass*.<sup>94</sup>

Following his return to Parliament in the Liberal landslide of 1906, Masterman voted against the government in debate on the Education Bill. He tabled an Amendment that would

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<sup>91</sup> John N. Figgis, "The Church and the Secular Theory of the State" (address to the Church Congress), *Church Times*, 13 October 1905, 441.

<sup>92</sup> Maurice Cowling, *Religion and Public Doctrine in Modern England*, 3 vols., *Accommodations* (Cambridge, 2002), 303–4.

<sup>93</sup> Masterman to Gladstone, 15 December 1904, BL Add. MSS 46062, fol. 53. 19 December 1904, BL Add. MSS 46062, fol. 55; 30 August 1905, BL Add. MSS 46063, fol. 60; 16 September 1905, BL Add. MSS 46063, fol. 87; 7 October 1905, BL Add. MSS 46063, folio 89; 20 October 1905, BL Add. MSS 46063, folio 99.

<sup>94</sup> Masterman, "Walt Whitman," review of Henry Bryan Binns, *A Life of Walt Whitman* (London, 1905), *DN*, 24 February 1906, 4; for positive evaluations of Whitman in the "democratic literary culture" advanced liberals sought to foster, see Macleod, *Literature, Journalism*, 83.



exclude all but what he termed “simple bible reading without comment” from publicly-funded schools, and as part of “secular” rather than religious education, as exemplified in America and in the Colonies. This would ensure that all children acquired some knowledge of the Bible, with no provision for withdrawal from lessons.<sup>95</sup> It was a modification of the extreme secular position he had urged Ponsonby to adopt three years earlier if negotiations with Nonconformists failed. Nevertheless, despite his claim that most practising Christians, including Nonconformists, favoured the secular solution in the interests of their faith, MPs rejected the amendment overwhelmingly. Undeterred, he wrote in *The Speaker* in the unmistakable tones of Old Liberalism that the most likely alternative – state-sponsored Protestantism in schools – was “entirely impossible for any Government to carry which calls itself Liberal.”<sup>96</sup>

The same concern for religious freedom underlay Masterman’s strenuous efforts in February 1908 to forestall the latest Church discipline bill on its second reading. Once again deploying the language of scripture, he wrote excitedly to Lucy Lyttelton : “I can smite these bigots I find, if I can get my amendment”.<sup>97</sup> The amendment proposed to disestablish the Church, a motion for which he had recently secured a slim majority at the Oxford Union, “amid rapturous applause from Jews, Indians, Rhodes scholars and various dissenters and atheists.”<sup>98</sup> He was confident that, should the amendment be called, “I can rally up the

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<sup>95</sup> Masterman, Speech to the House of Commons, 4<sup>th</sup> series, 22 May 1906, *Parliamentary Debates*, vol. 157, cols. 1232–9.

<sup>96</sup> Masterman, “Cross Currents in Education,” *The Speaker*, 16 June 1906, 245.

<sup>97</sup> Masterman to Lucy Lyttelton, 5 February 1908, CFGM Papers, 1/1/34. Kings II, 15:5: “And the Lord smote the king, so that he was a leper unto the day of his death...”

<sup>98</sup> Masterman to Lucy Lyttelton, u.d., CFGM Papers, 1/1/8.

Labour men and the Nonconformists and quite a number of members have come up to me and tell me that they will vote for me.... and Bob Cecil will persuade *his* ruffians to abstain.”<sup>99</sup> Balfour was working on Conservative MPs to do likewise, he reported, just before the debate itself.<sup>100</sup>

In the event, the amendment was proposed and seconded by Ramsay MacDonald.<sup>101</sup> During a long and frequently acrimonious debate, Masterman expressed his sympathy for those who were being “persecuted” by the bill’s supporters; they comprised most of the Liberal and socialist clergy dedicated to social welfare and the “great congregations” in the Church. He challenged his opponents to produce evidence that their proposals would enhance either the well-being of the Church, or religion or virtue. There were, he declared, in a speech that combined the political with the prophetic,

forces on the horizon which might be destined to make, which were already making, all this noisy controversy concerning ritual a very small thing. In the face of changes which might well shake this Christian civilisation of ours to its very base, he [Masterman] entreated those who were promoting this Bill to

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<sup>99</sup> Masterman to Lucy Lyttelton, 5 February 1908, CFGM Papers, 1/1/34; in L. Masterman, *C. F. G. Masterman*, 97. Like Masterman (Edward Algernon) Robert Gascoyne-Cecil, son of Lord Salisbury and a Tory progressive with deep roots in High Anglicanism, was first returned to Parliament in the 1906 election.

<sup>100</sup> Masterman to Lucy Lyttelton, 12 February 1908, CFGM Papers, 1/1/37, in L. Masterman, *C. F. G. Masterman*, 98.

<sup>101</sup> Ramsay MacDonald, Speech to the House of Commons, 4<sup>th</sup> series, 14 February 1908, *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, vol. 184, col. 325.

turn their minds and direct their energies to a more heroic, a more Christian crusade.<sup>102</sup>

The bill was talked out and the government refused to give it any further time,<sup>103</sup> clearly Masterman's primary objective. He would have been anxious to avoid the divisions within the party his amendment would have opened.

Masterman's advocacy of disestablishment was primarily an attempt to forge a new alliance between Anglicanism and Nonconformity – as envisaged in his letter to Ponsonby in 1903 – through Liberal politics of an advanced kind. Hitherto, the prospects had not been auspicious. Nonconformity had provided much of the momentum of anti-Ritualism in the last three decades of the nineteenth-century; as the self-appointed guardian of Protestantism in Britain, it had sought to protect the nation from what it regarded as the subversion of this religion within the Church.<sup>104</sup> However, the political ground of anti-ritualism shifted perceptibly at the turn of the century, with Conservative Anglicans at the forefront of the campaign against the High Church party. One Nonconformist MP – Percy Illingworth – supported Masterman's amendment because he did not wish to return to the days of religious coercion that in his view would result from the bill. The remedy for abuses of the Book of Common Prayer was “not penal repression, but through disestablishment the creation of a Free Church where lay opinion could make itself felt, and where religious life could grow and

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<sup>102</sup> Masterman, Speech to the House of Commons, 4<sup>th</sup> series, 14 February 1908, *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, vol. 184, col. 321.

<sup>103</sup> Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, response to a question in the House of Commons, 4<sup>th</sup> series, 19 February 1908, *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, vol. 184, cols. 802–3.

<sup>104</sup> Arthur Burns, “The Authority of the Church,” in Peter Mandler, ed., *Liberty and Authority in Victorian Britain*, (Oxford, 2006), 179–200, at 195–6.

expand to satisfy the religious hopes and aspirations of her members.”<sup>105</sup> With allies such as Illingworth among Nonconformists and a concerted move to bring the High Church clergy within the Liberal fold on an anti-Establishment, progressive agenda in the new, Conservative climate of anti-ritualism, New Liberalism could flourish as a religious as well as a political creed. Not least, since the late-nineteenth century Nonconformity – like High Church Anglicanism – had developed a strong basis in the teaching of the “social gospel” through Methodist preachers such as Hugh Price Hughes and Baptist leaders such as John Clifford; and this had seeped into Liberal party organisation at various levels.<sup>106</sup>

### **Liberal Progressivism and its Discontents**

Masterman’s defeat of the Church Discipline Bill coincided with the publication of some of his most ardent and programmatic statements of progressive Liberalism. In an article in February 1908, for example, he argued that a major obstacle in the path of reform was the widespread misconception that poverty was a “scourge of God”. Once this was corrected, the state could tackle the human causes of poverty, principally, a regime of casual labour supplemented by low-paid work in the sweated trades that defied regulation and kept unemployment at high levels. His solution lay first in a guarantee of temporary employment by the state and second, a state-enforced minimum wage determined by Wages Boards; such a wage would ensure that the worst employers were not placed at an advantage in economic

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<sup>105</sup> Percy Illingworth, Speech to the House of Commons, 14 February 1908, *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 4<sup>th</sup> Series, vol. 184, col. 329.

<sup>106</sup> Packer, “Religion and the New Liberalism,” 241–3.

competition.<sup>107</sup> Second, he advocated the extension of education until the age of sixteen for those who would not be employable under a system of the minimum wage, as well as housing reform.<sup>108</sup>

In making the case for a “fresh start” to social welfare following the failure of the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, Masterman aligned himself with Winston Churchill’s notion of a “Minimum Standard [of Life and Labour].”<sup>109</sup> At the same time, he distanced himself from the Webbs, who embraced a similar policy of the “National Minimum”. “They are always exceedingly interesting,” he remarked to Lucy Lyttelton in February 1908 following a lunch with them to “talk over the unemployed”; “and yet,” he continued, in the distinctive tones of advanced Liberalism, “I always leave with a sense of desolation. There is

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<sup>107</sup> Masterman, “Causes and Cures of Poverty,” *Albany Review* 2/11 (1908), 531–47, at 543–4.

<sup>108</sup> Masterman, “A Hopeful Outlook”, *The Commonwealth*, 10/12 (1905) 361–4, at 363; “Causes and Cures of Poverty,” at 535–9. This wider concern with the general welfare of society distinguished Masterman from William Beveridge, the other major liberal thinker to address the problem of unemployment in this period: see Freeden, *The New Liberalism*, 210–11.

<sup>109</sup> Masterman, “The Policy of the Minimum Standard,” *The Nation*, 15 February 1908, 700; Winston Churchill, “Liberalism and Socialism (1906),” *The Social Problem* (London, 1909), 81. For his friendship with Churchill at this time, see L. Masterman, *C. F. G. Masterman*, 97–8. He campaigned for Churchill in by-elections in Dundee and Manchester in the spring of 1908: see Masterman to Lucy Lyttelton, Queen’s Hotel, Dundee, 7 April, 1908, CFGM Papers, 1/1/52; Masterman to Lucy Lyttelton, Batley, u.d., CFGM Papers, 1/1/60; Masterman to Lucy Lyttelton, Midland Hotel, Manchester, u.d., 1/1/62.

no poetry there and no passion; and that makes life appear an arid, rather dusty affair.”<sup>110</sup>

Further, unlike the Webbs, he believed that energy and initiative should be rewarded above the level of the “National Minimum”. If Liberalism adopted such a policy, it would become the focus of a “great Middle Party,” poised between the movement towards Protection in the Conservative party on the one hand, and “full economic socialism” on the other.<sup>111</sup> Also, unlike both Churchill and the Webbs, and the wider ethos of advanced Liberalism, too, he appealed directly to the Christian church to help set the ethical boundaries within which the movement of capital would be permitted. This was his message to the session on “Capital and Labour” at the Pan-Anglican Congress in 1908; *The Times* reported that the session drew a “very large audience.”<sup>112</sup>

Above all, despite his concern to deflect criticism from the opponents of Liberalism, Masterman was seeking to keep the Liberal government on a progressivist track. In the previous year, he had feared it was already stalling, especially following the House of Lords’ rejection of the Education and Licensing Bills in 1907. His difficulties with the Education bill notwithstanding, he felt that the Government had failed to exploit the Lords’ challenge to its authority as the representative of the people, in addition to a wider public fear of socialism following the loss of Colne Valley to the Independent Labour Party in the by-election of July.<sup>113</sup> His frustration with the Government’s timidity, especially with respect to the Lords, only increased following his appointment as Under Secretary to the Local Government Board

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<sup>110</sup> Masterman to Lucy Lyttelton, 6 February 1908, CFGM Papers, 1/1/35.

<sup>111</sup> Masterman, “The Policy of the Minimum Standard,” 700.

<sup>112</sup> “The Pan-Anglican Congress,” *The Times*, 20 June 1908, 6.

<sup>113</sup> Masterman, “How the Government Stands,” *The Nation*, 24 August 1907, 925–6; see also “The Block upon Legislation,” *The Nation*, 11 May 1907, 406–7.

in 1908.<sup>114</sup> This mood coloured his literary work, particularly *The Condition of England*. One reviewer – the jurist Sir John MacDonnell – remonstrated against the book’s bleak picture of England, unrelieved by the improvements in life that had been enjoyed by many in recent years. He was also sceptical of the contrast Masterman drew between previous ages of faith and the “destructive rationalism” of the present: he asked, “Were they so deeply religious inwardly, so free from the materialistic elements, so truly spiritual” as to merit such treatment?<sup>115</sup> Another reviewer was equally despairing: “Mr. Masterman wavers from despondency to hope, wavers from hope to caution and ends by saying that he cannot tell where we stand.”<sup>116</sup>

Masterman was undeterred by such criticism and made no attempt to moderate the prophetic influences on his thought that were largely responsible. For example, following the National Insurance Act of 1911, in the framing and passage of which he had played a pivotal role, he feared a policy vacuum. He spelt out the consequences in a detailed letter to Lloyd George in May 1913 while campaigning at the Altrincham by-election, a seat which the Liberals had lost to the Conservatives at the general election. He couched his concern in a play upon Luke 11, 14-28:

...I am more than ever convinced that the sooner we give something definite for our people to clutch on to the better. The House is empty, swept and garnished and the

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<sup>114</sup> See his long, hastily written letter to Asquith, 3 February 1910, Parliamentary Archives, SAM/A/30.

<sup>115</sup> [Anon]. “The Condition of England,” *Times Literary Supplement*, 10 June 1909, 215. (*Times Literary Supplement Historical Archive*).

<sup>116</sup> “E. R.,” “The Condition of England,” *The English Review* 3/9 (1909), 182.

devils of anti-Insurance and Tariff [reform] march gaily in. We can't go on saying much longer "When the time comes we shall expect you to help us" etc.<sup>117</sup>

His call for a renewal of the Land Campaign, co-ordinating a new policy on land valuation, slum housing, and rural decay failed to win support in the party and, because of political difficulties, was absent from his own campaign in Ipswich in May 1914.<sup>118</sup>

Yet as a faithful servant of the government, Masterman quickly lost the support of those whose Liberal progressivism was also founded upon Christian beliefs. These included suffragettes such as Ennis Richmond, who wrote to him from West Heath School, Hampstead in October 1909. She reminded him that only six weeks previously, she had risked arrest in seeking to speak to him in Palace Yard, Westminster "on the then position of women working for women's suffrage," a reference to the force feeding they had been made to endure; he had duly come out of the House and, she implied, allowed her to take away a message of hope to the (pacifist) Women's Freedom League. But in failing to act since, and in dismissing concern for the treatment of women prisoners that had been expressed in the House recently, he had betrayed his Liberal and Christian vision.

You know that what women who demand the vote now, are asking men and praying GOD for is the liberty to come in and raise the 'Condition of England' – You have stood to thousands of women as the champion of what is highest and best in our religious life and in our social aspirations and now – when I

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<sup>117</sup>Masterman to Lloyd George, u.d., Parliamentary Archives, LG/c/1/1/7a; for a report of his address to a lively meeting in Sale, see "From Newmarket to Altrincham," *The Times*, 20 May 1913, 6. The Liberal Party failed to re-gain the seat.

<sup>118</sup>Packer, *Lloyd George, Liberalism and the Land*, 143; David, "The New Liberalism of C. F. G. Masterman," 30–1.



think of your answers in the House to Mr. Keir Hardie. [*sic*] It is, as I say, a bitter disappointment.<sup>119</sup>

This sense of betrayal extended further. As a Roman Catholic, Hilaire Belloc had always kept Masterman at arm's length: as early as 1906, he condemned him publicly as a faint-hearted "literary" Christian who lacked the firmness of faith in the future of Christianity that marked the Catholic Church, past and present.<sup>120</sup> When Masterman attempted to secure Bethnal Green after being unseated at West Ham for alleged electoral irregularities in June 1911, Belloc joined an array of anti-government forces, including suffragettes, which sought to thwart his campaign.<sup>121</sup> Belloc's intervention appalled those in the secular stream of advanced Liberalism. For example, in congratulating Masterman on his success in winning Bethnal Green, albeit by a slim majority, George Trevelyan condemned Belloc as "one of those people who think that violent partisanship which he is pleased to call piety turn any ill

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<sup>119</sup> Ennis Richmond to Masterman, 16 October 1909, CFGM Papers, 4/2/2/6. She was referring to his exchanges with Keir Hardie in the House of Commons on 5 October 1909; reported in *The Times*, 6 October 1909, 5. For the priority that Masterman gave to the government's reform agenda above that of women's suffrage, see L. Masterman, *C.F.G. Masterman*, 384.

<sup>120</sup> Hilaire Belloc, *An Open letter on the Alleged Decay of Faith* (London, 1906), reprinted from *The Tribune*, 29 March 1906; a response to Masterman, "The Future of Religion," *The Speaker*, 24 March 1906, 592–3.

<sup>121</sup> For the varied nature of the opposition, see L. Masterman, *C. F. G. Masterman*, 197.

conduct on his part into noble minded zeal and enthusiasm. Lord Hugh Cecil appears to suffer from the same unpleasing delusion...”<sup>122</sup>

Unsurprisingly, there is no record of support for Masterman among Conservative Anglicans, but less because of his Christian progressivism than his bitter indictment of the existing Church, especially during debates over Welsh Disestablishment in 1912.<sup>123</sup>

Chesterton – still an Anglican and a Liberal, although with little affiliation either to the Church or the party – was no longer an ally. In the dedication of his book *What's Wrong with the World* to Masterman in the previous year, he apologised for presenting “so wild a composition to one who has recorded two or three of the really impressive visions of the moving millions of England”; Masterman, he wrote, was “the only man alive who can make the map of England crawl with life.” But, he continued, politicians, “are none the worse for a few inconvenient ideals,” and besides, his friend would recognise in the book their many arguments together.<sup>124</sup> Chesterton reinforced their differences in a poignant letter written in the shadow of the Marconi Scandal of 1912.<sup>125</sup> In this, Masterman supported Lloyd George

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<sup>122</sup> Trevelyan to Masterman, 31 July 1911, CFGM Papers, 3/5/25. For Lord Hugh Cecil, see William S. Rodner, “Conservatism, Resistance and Lord Hugh Cecil,” *History of Political Thought*, 9/3 (1988), 529–52, esp. 539–42.

<sup>123</sup> For the hostility of Sir William Anson, Warden of All Souls and MP for the University of Oxford, on this account, see Herbert Hensley Henson (ed.), *A Memoir of the Right Honourable Sir William Anson* (Oxford, 1920), 215.

<sup>124</sup> Chesterton, *What's Wrong with the World* (London, 1910), Dedication; and see Masterman's friendly, if sceptical review, “The Battle of Hudge and Gudge,” *The Nation*, 2 July 1910, 483–4.

<sup>125</sup> Chesterton to Masterman, u.d. [December 1912] CFGM Papers, 4/6/1/1 (copy).

over allegations concerning insider dealing among members of the Government, while Chesterton supported Belloc's campaigning *Witness* journals.<sup>126</sup> That association ensured the problematic nature of Chesterton's own Liberalism; he shared the anti-Semitism of the political class he otherwise condemned, a prejudice to which Masterman was by no means immune.<sup>127</sup> But his despair of Masterman raises questions concerning Masterman's relationship to Liberalism and to the Liberal party as he became increasingly entangled in government. To what extent did his Christian socialism retreat as his support for Liberalism lost some of its earlier ambiguity?

### **Conflicting loyalties: the Liberal party, new Liberalism, and Anglicanism**

The force of Masterman's Christianity certainly diminished as he entered government. Tellingly, during the first Christmas following his marriage, he was anxious that he and Lucy should not

relax our eagerness to do something for the poor . . . I feel that I am not so much inclined to care, or at least to break into revolt against conditions of poverty, as I come to settle down in the social order as one of a settled society accepting the whole as "whatever is; is right."

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<sup>126</sup> David, "The New Liberalism of C. F. G. Masterman," 28; for the *Witness* journals and the Marconi scandal, see Tom Villis, *Reaction and Avant-Garde: The Revolt Against Liberal Democracy in Early Twentieth-Century Britain* (London, 2006), 80–2.

<sup>127</sup> For Masterman's anti-Semitic remarks about Herbert Samuel, see Masterman to Lloyd George, u.d. but written following the passage of the Insurance Act, 1911; CFGM Papers, 4/1/3/13.

Still more revealingly, he added:

I think in the future we should try to get more religious observance. These Sundays and weekends play havoc with that. Anyway, let's sometimes come above the smoke and confused noises of the city to see the stars, and listen to their silences.<sup>128</sup>

At the same time, his devotion to the Liberal party and to a conception of its lineage intensified. In 1911, in his entry on the Liberal party to the eleventh edition of *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, he asserted the party's claim to represent "government by the people, by means of trust in the people, in a sense which denies genuine popular sympathy to its opponents." He added that "throughout its career the Liberal Party has always been pushed forward by its extreme Radical wing", commencing with – quoting Leigh Hunt – the "newer and more thoroughgoing Whigs . . . since called Liberals."<sup>129</sup> The following year, in an Introduction to a book by a radical Liberal MP, he praised the Government for so altering the environment that the "sickly etiolated child of the 'mean streets' is now recognised as being not a thing to be lightly thrown aside, but an asset to the State, – a stone

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<sup>128</sup> Masterman to Lucy Masterman, u.d [27 December 1908], CFGM Papers, 1/1/80, quoting Alexander Pope, *An Essay on Man* (1774). Lucy quoted from the letter in her biography but with ellipsis for the passage expressing his concern about their neglect of religion: *C. F. G. Masterman*, 116.

<sup>129</sup> [anon.] "The Liberal Party," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11<sup>th</sup> edition (New York, 1911); in CFGM Papers, 55/4.

in the fabric of the Empire.”<sup>130</sup> So complete was his sympathy with Liberalism, indeed Liberal Imperialism, that he did not obstruct the passage of the Mental Deficiency Act in 1913, which put into practice aspects of the Eugenics policy he had condemned earlier in reviewing Hobson’s work. By contrast Chesterton, in association with the Liberal MP Josiah Wedgwood, was vocal in his opposition.<sup>131</sup>

Masterman’s identity as a Liberal survived the introduction of conscription – which he had attempted to forestall in his journalism<sup>132</sup> – the party’s split in 1916, and Lloyd George’s coalition with the Conservatives, which he strenuously opposed.<sup>133</sup> It also held up in the face of his clear move to the left of the party after the war when, apart from a brief period from 1923–24, he remained out of parliament. At the invitation of the local Liberal Association, he stood unsuccessfully as an Independent Liberal in the mining constituency of Clay Cross at the general election of 1922. His programme included the creation of a Central Mining Board, which would have the power “to make coal the property of the nation.”<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Introduction to Percy Alden, *Democratic England* (London, 1912), xi. The reference to “mean streets” is to Arthur Morrison’s realist fiction centred on the East End in *Tales of Mean Streets* (1894).

<sup>131</sup> See Stapleton, ed., *G.K. Chesterton at the Daily News*, 8: 85–9, 128–34, 142–45, 198–207.

<sup>132</sup> Masterman, “Why the Workman Enlists,” *The Nation*, 11 September 1915, 762–4.

<sup>133</sup> For Masterman’s denunciation of, and subsequent reconciliation with Lloyd George in 1925, see David, “The New Liberalism of C. F. G. Masterman,” 33–41.

<sup>134</sup> See his election addresses: “To the Electors of Clay Cross Division;” “A Word to the Miners;” and “Mr Masterman replies to Mr Duncan.” I am indebted to Special Collections, Bristol University Library, for making these addresses available.

Yet for all his embrace of Labour policies such as this after the War, Masterman retained his distinctiveness as a Liberal progressive, and one, moreover, who was defined by close ties with the Church of England and a sustained belief in the need for its disestablishment. The use of the Church's pulpits to denounce Britain's enemies during the War strengthened this conviction; after a visit to Westminster Abbey, he compared the service there to the work he was then engaged in commissioning at Wellington House as head of the Government's propaganda unit.<sup>135</sup> While a loyal servant of the state, he did not wish the Church to become one, too.

Masterman became increasingly agitated by the closeness of Church and State; in the 1920s, he wrote occasional pieces in this vein for *The Churchman*, the organ of the American Episcopal Church, the sister church of the Church of England, whose self-governing status he looked upon enviously. He used these opportunities to lament the crisis of the Church as he perceived it. This was not created by overheated theological debates, as in the nineteenth century, but by the Church's growing status as a mere social and philanthropic body in local communities, which seemed to pass unquestioned. He reported that his prophecy in *In Peril of Change* – that the Church would become a mere arm of the state if it remained Established – had largely been fulfilled; in the process, the Church had emptied itself of all but a vague, undenominational religion that required “no real belief in anything except a kind of limited hope in the existence of God and the possibility of life beyond the grave.”<sup>136</sup> The advent of Modernism in this theological vacuum had done little to revive interest in religious questions

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<sup>135</sup> L. Masterman, *C. F. G. Masterman*, 290.

<sup>136</sup> Masterman, “Disestablishment,” *The Churchman*, 6 May 1922, 16.

outside of the intellectual classes.<sup>137</sup> Equally, he argued that the movement of social Christianity had become detached from its theological and scholarly roots, certainly under the leadership of William Temple, Bishop of Manchester whom he described as the “type of the modern practical bishop.” Nevertheless, he welcomed Temple’s willingness at least to discuss the possibility of disestablishment in the early 1920s. At the same time, he defended the earlier legacy of the CSU against Conservative critics such as Lord Hugh Cecil, despite their shared links with the High Church.<sup>138</sup>

Masterman believed that while it remained Established, the Church was powerless to address the problem of growing religious apathy in rural areas and a socialism that seemed focused primarily on material improvement in the cities.<sup>139</sup> Only a few years earlier he had inveighed against Temple’s “Life and Liberty” movement that sought more independence for the Church but within the existing Church-State establishment. He castigated the Enabling Bill that resulted from Life and Liberty following its presentation in the House of Lords in June 1919; while allowing the Church a degree of self-government, the proposed legislation – which was enacted later in the year against all his expectations – still left the Church at the mercy of parliamentary opinion.<sup>140</sup> He became even more convinced of the need for a

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<sup>137</sup> Masterman, “The English Church Congress,” *The Churchman*, 28 November 1925, 12; see also “The English Modernist Conference”, *The Churchman*, 22 October 1921, 16–17.

<sup>138</sup> Masterman, “Disestablishment”, *The Churchman*, 6 May 1922, 15; “Christianity and Social Reform: A Reply to Lord Hugh Cecil,” *The Guardian Supplement*, 27 February 1925, 205.

<sup>139</sup> Masterman, “The English Church Congress,” 12.

<sup>140</sup> Masterman, “The Enabling Bill and Disestablishment,” *The Westminster Gazette*, 4 June 1919, 8.

complete separation between Church and State as the Church prepared to bring before Parliament the alternative Prayer Book, a move that would accommodate some Anglo-Catholic practices alongside the Book of Common Prayer and end several decades of internal warfare over “discipline”.<sup>141</sup> His fear that the Book would be rejected by politicians who had no connection with the Church was realised immediately after his death in November 1927, its first defeat in December of that year and its second the following June.

Arguably, it was the need for disestablishment that most attracted Masterman to, and kept him within the Liberal party fold, for all the temptation he felt to join Ponsonby and other former Liberals in the Labour party after his defeat at Clay Cross.<sup>142</sup> Clearly, he hoped to revive the association between the Liberal party and Nonconformity that Gladstone had forged, if loosely, around this issue, although the struggle had lost much of its fervour by the interwar period.<sup>143</sup> One of his final tasks was to prepare the popular edition of Morley’s *Life of Gladstone*, in the preface of which he emphasised Gladstone’s reservations about the principle of Establishment, and his exclusion from the Church’s confidence as a result.<sup>144</sup> As we have seen, Masterman emphasised the necessity of a Church that, duly liberated from the shackles of the state, would continue to challenge the complacency of government about social conditions, whichever party was in power; this was a version of Gladstone’s belief in

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<sup>141</sup> Masterman, “The English Church Congress,” 12. For the context of the Prayer Book crisis, see Matthew Grimley, *Citizenship, Community, and the Church of England: Liberal Anglican Theories of the State between the Wars* (Oxford, 2004), ch. 4.

<sup>142</sup> David, “The New Liberalism of C. F. G. Masterman,” 34.

<sup>143</sup> Koss, *Nonconformity in Modern British Politics*, 179.

<sup>144</sup> John Morley, *The Life of Gladstone*, popular edition abridged, with illustrations and facsimiles, and a preface by C. F. G. Masterman (London, 1927), xxiii-iv.



the Universal Church as the divinely appointed instrument of salvation, for all its many weaknesses.<sup>145</sup> The Labour party had always resisted the inclusion of disestablishment among its policies, despite sympathy for the cause among some of its members since its early years, and despite the presiding role of R. H. Tawney in shaping its religious and moral foundation, and Tawney's heavy indebtedness to Charles Gore in turn.<sup>146</sup>

## **Conclusion.**

What general conclusions can be drawn concerning the relationship of New Liberalism to religion? Through Masterman, this article has made clear the dependence of New Liberalism on a radical vision of the Church of England's role in society. Despite experiencing a weakening of his religious faith at various points in his life, he fixed his sights firmly on the Church as the spiritual force that could most energise social and political change, and provide a moral focus for the nation – as distinct from the state – at the same time. In this he was unique among advanced Liberals who, whatever the source and degree of their religiosity, maintained the groundswell of British Liberalism as a secular movement, free from ecclesiastical connections, even connections that had been disendowed, as Masterman aspired for the Church of England.<sup>147</sup> Yet while he sought to erode the worldliness of the Church and enhance its social and political radicalism in turn, he defended the Liberal party's engagement with financial interests on which its pre-war success had been

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<sup>145</sup> *Ibid*, xxiii.

<sup>146</sup> Peter Catterall, *Labour and the Free Churches, 1918-39: Radicalism, Righteousness and Religion* (London, 2016), 175-7; Kirby, "R. H. Tawney and Christian Social Teaching", 807-8.

<sup>147</sup> "The Enabling Bill and Disestablishment".

built, albeit with strong biblical resonances. As late as 1926, he urged Liberals to disregard the taunts of their opponents relating to “Central party chests or Central party funds. After all, these things do the Gentiles seek.” He continued, “the duty of Liberalism is not to interest itself in recriminations concerning the control of the monetary subscriptions of wealthy men.”<sup>148</sup> It would seem that the price of salvaging Liberalism as a radical political creed with clear Christian underpinnings could never be too high from a prophetic point of view.

There was a good deal of truth in Chesterton’s statement of regret on the death of his erstwhile friend that he had been used by politicians against his better nature as a modern-day Jeremiah.<sup>149</sup> Nonetheless, Masterman’s Liberalism and his Christianity were mutually reinforcing, if often obscured by party struggles; as such, he was more than simply a Liberal progressive who happened to be a Christian and his Christianity was more than simply a youthful phase which he abandoned as his political influence increased. This article has shown that throughout his career he drew freely on biblical analogies in his writings and speeches, reinforced by the rhetoric of modern prophecy, and driven above all by a vision of national salvation. As he remarked on the plight of rural labourers at the Altrincham by-election in 1913, “I for one will never be satisfied until the labourers’ cause is merged in the redemption of the whole race of man in rural England.”<sup>150</sup> This serves to underline his distinctive conception of the New Liberalism as a mission to restore Britain’s lost Christian

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<sup>148</sup> Masterman, “Seven Don’ts for Liberals,” *DN*, 30 January 1926. The allusion is to Matthew, 6:31. “(For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly father knoweth that you have need of all these things.”

<sup>149</sup> Chesterton, “Charles Masterman,” *G. K. ’s Weekly* 6/141 (26 November 1927), 775.

<sup>150</sup> “From Newmarket to Altrincham,” *The Times*, 20 May 1913, 6.

faith through a disestablished church; on this the success of its political programme depended, and the renewal of the Church in turn as a national institution. If we are to understand the multi-faceted nature of the New Liberalism, we need to take seriously the inspiration it drew from religion as well as secular currents of thought, and recognise the nuances that resulted. This is despite the resulting tensions, both within the work of individual thinkers and across the movement, which still exist in British Liberalism today.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Tim Farron, leader of the Liberal party from 2015–2017, resigned because of the pressure on his Christian beliefs through engagement in politics.